

BILL SULLY

1 What was your most memorable theatrical experience as a child?

A I grew up in the country, and the only nearby city had no real theatre, but I do recall an amateur performance in a church hall where a man and a woman kissed onstage, and the audience gasped. I was thrilled. I was already hooked on movies, but this was something else, this was alive. Later, when I got to see a local production of *The Little Foxes*, I was knocked out by the end, where Regina exits up the stairs laughing – but by then I wasn't a child.

2 Is there a production you wish you'd seen?

A I rarely think about theatre I've missed because in my lifetime I've seen so many classic stage performances, but yes, there are three original Broadway productions I do wish I'd seen – *Lady in the Dark*, *Pal Joey* and *The Glass Menagerie*.

3 Who was the person who made the biggest impact on your career?

A My father, who always challenged me. He'd played in a band and loved to sing, was always singing. Beautiful voice, beautiful man. Naturally we disagreed about what were good songs. Irving Berlin we both respected, but at different periods. Later he came round when we shared my recordings of *Oh What a Lovely War* and a revival of *The Merry Widow*. This generational struggle had a happy ending when my parents came to visit me in London. I'd written songs for a Christmas panty with Danny La Rue that had been such a hit it was still running in the summer. The orchestra struck up one of my tunes in the overture. My father nudged the man on his right, a perfect stranger, and said "My son wrote that." Best moment of my life.

4 Who are your heroes (writing/composing etc. or otherwise?)

A Tell me when to stop: Larry Hart, Scott Fitzgerald, Debussy, Judy Garland, Em-

ily Bronte, Frank Loesser, Esther Williams, E.M. Forster, Harry Warren, Brahms, Tennessee Williams, Oscar Wilde, Alice Munro, Billy Wilder, D.H. Lawrence, Arthur Ransome, Cézanne, Artemus Ward, Bette Davis, Rodgers, Kern, Gershwin, Arlen...

5 If you could be anyone (past, present or fictional) who would you choose to be and why?

A I've never wanted to be anyone else, because it would mean losing what I have.

6 If you could have a love affair with anyone (past, present or fictional), who would you choose?

A I've had enough love affairs, thanks, to want another. I also doubt any of my idols would have been any great shakes in that department – except of course for Alice Munro & Esther Williams!

7 When you sit down to work, what must you have with you in the room?

A I don't sit down to work – I'm a songwriter & I write songs in my head while I'm walking. I figure if I can't remember the tune, how can I expect anyone else to? When I write I look, however, I do need, must have with me in the

room (I admit it) – a collaborator.

8 When you're in despair with a piece of work, how do you maneuver out of that?

A Never my problem – what I'm usually in despair about is how to get the damned thing on.

9 If you hadn't become a dramatist, what profession would you have chosen?

A Is that what I am? I'm a songwriter, a writer of book. Also I've been a newspaper editor, post grad assistant, timber cruiser, typist, chorus boy, telemarketer, actor, novelist, teacher, cabaret performer, stage manager, director, pianist. But I guess I'm a dramatist, if it's what I do, what I love, what always comes first.

10 Which of all your works is your favorite, and why?

A *Boy Meets Boy* is very special, even more so now that it's being revived. *The Great American Backstage Musical* was great fun & made me a living. But the answer has to be *The Cat in the Castle*. I was alone in New York, and Edith O'Hara asked me to write a children's musical. That had never happened to me before, nobody had ever asked me to write a musical. I did it all in less than three weeks, even made the scenery, and at the opening performance had to pinch-hit for an absent leading-man and play Ptommy the pterodactyl. But the audience loved it, and so did the critics (it's been revived many times since). Best of all, the kids liked it, and I love kids. What's better than that?

BILL SULLY has written book, lyrics and music for more than twenty musicals, seven of them with Donald Ward (including *Boy Meets Boy*, *The Great American Backstage Musical* and Kleban winner *Sweet William*). He has composed special material for star performers, created many musicals for children, and recorded seven CDs of his songs.